

THE (NON)EXISTENCE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND ROMANIAN FEMINISM AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the issue of women's status in Romanian society from the perspective of legal nature regulations that will eventually emphasize the social framework at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, in which Romanian feminism is manifested. At the end of the 19th Century, as the feminist movement begins to manifest here, the purpose of feminists' actions was to contest the inferior position of women not only at the legal level but also at the social and cultural one. The beginning of this battle is approached in this study.

Key words: civil rights, political rights, woman, feminism, social status.

1. Introduction

In the past, with a few exceptions, it was a male-dominated society, in which the role of women was practically non-existent¹. Therefore the men becomes the reference element in the society, any meditation of human nature was referring to him, as the essence of human species. The woman remained the expression of maternity and sexuality², a situation that will last for a long time. Educated from childhood how to be good wives for their husbands, the girls didn't have their own ideals or desires. They were being raised only to get married and be good wives. The only other alternative that remained to young girls was to choose the way of the monastery and of monarchism³.

In Romanian society, towards the end of the 19th Century, it is hard to remake the daily puzzle where women were undertaking their daily activity because "in order to track them down it needs a lot of patience", we find them hidden away "among chronicles and [...] among piles of old papers" says Constantin Gane.⁴ But even among this pile of old chronicles about which the author speaks, we do not find many references to the ordinary woman but only to those that "had a name" and who "if they didn't write their Memoirs, it was because they didn't

¹ As an example, the history of the first centuries of the roman society doesn't include any reference of women. In this regard the legend of Goddess Rhea is significant. She disappears immediately after giving birth to the two twins, Romulus and Remus who will be breastfed by a she-wolf. Guy Achard, *Femeie în Romo ontică*, (Bucharest: Prietenii Cărții, 2009), 7.

² *Ibid*, 22.

³ This was often a path they were willingly heading because it offered them the opportunity of getting an education or some responsibilities that they couldn't have got otherwise.

⁴ Constantin Gane, *Amărâte și vesele vieți de jupâne și cucoane*, (Bucharest: Corint, 2016), 15.

know to read and write, and they didn't have a biographer, because our poor scribes from that period had other worries, than to leave the posterity their writings about the lives of the women they met".⁵

The issue regarding women's status in the society doesn't only imply a dichotomous perception related to the realities of private and public life. The subject itself is an extremely bidding one and can be approached from a multitude of perspectives but, eventually, as Paul Veyne said, this is what history is about, "a multiple knowledge".⁶

Romanian Historiography in this field is a rather inadequate one. Although it has been more than a century since Nicolae Iorga's "Women in the Life of Our People"⁷, has been published, Romanian Historiography still doesn't have a significant number of women's biographies.

With a series of clarifications, gender studies have appeared in recent years, in this regard we remember names like Mihaela Miroiu⁸, Maria Bucur⁹, Laura Grünberg, Ștefania Mihăilescu or Oana Băluță.

If we move away a little from the feminist approach of gender writing, things are even worse. Works that approach the evolution of the status of women over time are scarce and disparate. Among those who were particularly inclined on this multifaceted subject are Alin Ciupală¹⁰, Nicoleta Roman, George Marcu or Costel Coroban with his study regarding the hospitals of Scottish women from Romania during World War I.¹¹

It was not by chance that I have divided these examples into gender and historical approaches. By doing this I have tried to emphasize the fact that the history of women is not synonymous with the history of feminism. However, to talk about feminine and the history of women without integrating feminism and its implications is like trying to make a history of Christianity without approaching the issue and implications of The Great Schism.

On the other hand, in order to discuss about women's status in the society, we must also take into account the rules of civil law which limit or widen the area in which women can affirm themselves in a certain period of time. We can mention here the legal content studies of Cristina Pop¹² or Anca Elena Bălășoiu¹³ – but this is still a modest beginning. There is still a need for an overall study regarding the legal status of women over time, without which we can't have a clear vision of the status of women in society.

This study approaches the issue of women's status and the beginning of their fight for their rights in Romanian society at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, and although I assume that this

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Paul Veyne, *Cum se scrie istorio: text integral*, (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1999), 20-23.

⁷ Nicolae Iorga, *Femeile în viața neamului nostru. Chipuri, datine, fapte, morții*, (Vălenii de Munte: Tipografia Neamul Românesc, 1911).

⁸ At the moment, Mihaela Miroiu is professor at The National School of Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA), Ph D supervisor in Political Sciences and permanent teacher of the Feminist Political Theories course. In 1994, she was the first to initiate the first courses of feminist theories at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest and, also, in 1998 she initiated the first master's degree in Gender Studies in Romania. In 2001 she initiated and coordinated the first collection of Gender Studies in the country, at Polirom Publishing House. A master's programme entitled "Gender, Minorities and Citizenship within The European Union" is coordinated by Professor Eniko Vincze Ph D at the Babeș-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca.

⁹ Maria Bucur, Romanian researcher that teaches gender studies at John W. Hill Chair of European History, The History Department of Indiana Bloomington University, USA., captures very well the current situation of gender historiography like this: "When I think of the recent field of gender studies in Eastern Europe, the following metaphor comes to my mind: gender historiography, like an archipelago of individual efforts, most often immature and unrelated, which erupts regularly, like many volcanic islands, related to the institutional places of power in the academic environment rather by rafts than by solid bridges", Maria Bucur, „An archipelago of Stories: Gender History in Eastern Europe”, *American Historical Review*, vol. 113 Issue, December 2008, p. 1975.

¹⁰ Alin Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea*, (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2003); Idem, *Bătăliile lor. Femeile din România în Primul Război Mondial*, (Iași: Polirom, 2017); Idem (coord.), *Despre femei și istoria lor în România*, (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2004). Alin Ciupală is the holder of the first History of Women Course introduced within The Faculty of History at the University of Bucharest, in the academic year 2001-2002. The course deals with women in the 19th Century Romanian society with reference to public and private space.

¹¹ Costel Coroban, *Potârnicile gri. Spitalele Femeilor Scoțiene din România: 1916 – 1917*, (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2012).

¹² Cristina Pop, *Divorțul și succesiunile. Instrumente juridice de emancipare a femeii în societatea română*, (Bucharest: Universul juridic, 2018).

¹³ Anca - Elena Bălășoiu, *Drepturile femeilor în justiție internațională: aspecte teoretice și de practică judiciară*, (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2018); Idem, *Criminalitate și victimologie feminină*, (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2017).

subject can be formulated, as I have previously said, from multiple perspectives, I propose to highlight first of all the legal limitations that women faced during the mentioned period, that restricted them to a limited private space, from which they managed to get out naturally, whenever life's needs compelled them to do so. One such moment was World War I.

In the research undertaken, I don't claim to consider a subject exhausted that is in fact inexhaustible.

2. Legal Regulations. Women's Civil and Political Rights at the End of the 19th Century and the Beginning of the 20th Century.

The legal status of women in a society can be considered "a barometer of democracy and modernity"¹⁴ and starting from the legal references, research over the place and role of women in Romanian society could eventually lead to a profound knowledge of its reality.

It is well-known the fact that in the legislation of the 19th Century, women lacked political rights. Therefore, Caragea Law¹⁵ showed that "only men become boyars, public judges (...) women are removed from all political dominions, authority and political offices".¹⁶

The documents of the time show that the legal status of the Romanian women was really humiliating: "According to tradition, within marriage, man was the master. The codex of Vasile Lupu and Matei Basarab consented the supremacy of man, who had the right to punish his wife if she made a mistake (to be seized, to be beaten, <<but not too much>>)".¹⁷

Pravilniceasca Condiță (ore The Code of Ipsilanti) that was applied in Wallachia from 1780 to 1817, granted to the surviving spouse, regardless of sex or financial state, a right of inheritance from the estate of the deceased husband, the extent of the rights granted depended on the existence or non-existence of descendants. However, there were limitations for women. For example, if the widow remarried not respecting the year of mourning, she was removed from the succession of the deceased.¹⁸ However, this legislations that precedes the Civil Code of 1865, contained a series of measures by which the financial condition of women¹⁹ was followed, defining the roles from within the family (of husband and father) in a less rigid manner than the new Civil Code will do.²⁰

The principle of equal opportunity was therefore far from being applied in the legislation of the time. The first document that puts the issue of gender equality is "The Proclamation of Islaz" from June 9, 1848 which at article 16 provides "complete and equal instruction for Romanians of both sexes"²¹.

In Romania, by The Public Instruction Law from 1864, school becomes mandatory and free between the ages of 7 and 12. The law also regulated the situation of secondary schools for girls "established in all towns where

¹⁴ Cătălin Turliuc, "Reconstrucția statutului femeii de la discriminare la dezvoltarea profesională și egalitatea de șanse II" în *Cronico*, nr. 3, 2011, 2.

¹⁵ *Legiureo Corogeo* is the law codicil applied in Wallachia from 1818 until the 1864 Civil Code entered into force. In the same period, in Moldavia, the Calimach Code was applied, which entered into force in 1817.

¹⁶ *Legiureo Corogeo*, (Bucharest: Academia R.P.R., 1955), 6.

¹⁷ Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte (1838 - 1929)*, (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 17 – 18. See also Alin Ciupală, *Femeie în societatea românească o secolului al XIX-lea*, 17 – 48.

¹⁸ *Pravilniceasca Condiță: 1780 (Adunoreo izvoorelor vechiului drept românesc scris)*, (Bucharest: Academia R.P.R., 1957), 102-106, 213-2134.

¹⁹ Elena Olariu, "Statutul femeii la mijlocul veacului al XIX-lea" în Alin Ciupală (coord.), *Despre femei și istoria lor în România*, Editura Universității din București, 2004, online edition: <http://ebooks.unibuc.ro/istorie/ciupala/includereaexcluderea.htm>, accessed on October 20, 2017.

²⁰ Maria Bucur, Mihaela Miroiu (ed.), *Potriorhot și emoncipore în istoria gândirii politice românești*, (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 117.

²¹ Apud Damian Hurezeanu, Gheorghe Sbârna, *Portide și curente politice în România 1821 – 1918. Programe și orientări doctrinare. 150 de surse originole*, (Bucharest: Eficent, 2000), 86. Although this provision was one advanced for Europe at that time, in the field of education, as in other areas, Romania has modernized late n report with Western Europe, which also heavily influenced the way Romanian women had access to quality education but also to a number of functions that are in line with their training possibilities. See also Ana Maria Stan, "Eliza Constantinescu – Bagdad. Portretul unei feministe din lumea academică interbelică", în *Anuorul Institutului de Istorie <<George Borițiu>> din Cluj-Napoca*, tom XLIX, 2010, p. 245.

there are high school for boys”²² however, illiteracy continues later on to be a major issue of Romanian society, regarding both men and in particular women²³ even after adopting The Law of Secondary Education from 1928, which always stipulated that secondary education will be the same for boys and girls.²⁴

This was primarily due to a refractory mentality about the girls' training, not only in the rural area but also in the urban environment, including among the cultured people of the time, who considered that the only training girls needed is the one that helped them to become good wives, housewives, and mothers. Even in cases where girls had extraordinary school results, they failed to break the barriers of private space in order to impose themselves in the public one. An example is Sarmiza Bilcescu who, after becoming Doctor in Law in Paris in 1880, being the first woman in Europe that achieved this performance, was admitted in the Ilfov Bar in 1891, something that had not yet happened in other countries in Europe. With all these brilliant results, she never practiced law, becoming Mrs. Alimănișteanu in 1897 when she married engineer Constantin Alimăniștenu.²⁵

This medieval-type legislation will be maintained not only throughout the 19th Century but also at the beginning of the 20th Century, the limits being thus imposed by the Civil Code, which entered into force on December 1, 1865²⁶.

This consecrated the civil inequality of women. For example, article 950, included women amongst incapables, with minors and the banned/forbidden²⁷. Calypso Botez, feminist militant of the era summarized this situation like this: “We, Romanian women [...] by Napoleonic Code, that governs us, are classified [...] amongst children, minors, madmen and idiots. We cannot administrate our assets, we cannot do anything without the husband’s approval, we cannot raise our children the way we see fit, we cannot even have one thing in our house at our disposal, because the law stipulates that in a house where there is a man, everything belongs to him. In one word the woman moves only after the magic wand of marital authority.”²⁸

This Civil Code declared the incapacity of married women in the preparation of public documents. Also, the woman couldn’t conclude any administrative documents except with the consent of her husband or justice, if she married a foreigner she would lose her nationality (art. 19), she was compelled to have her residence established by her husband (art. 93 and art. 196), she was compelled to obey her husband (art. 195) and other similar things.²⁹

Neither the 1866 Constitution brought any great changes in women's rights. Therefore, article 10, of The 1866 Constitution of Romania³⁰, although it stipulated that “every Romanian is equal before the law”, it didn’t make any references to women. They were excluded from exercising the civil and political rights. Their exclusion was explained by reference to the provisions of the Civil Code which placed married women under the authority of the man and the unmarried women under the authority of her father or brother.

²² Alin Ciupală, *Femeie în societate românească o secolului al XIX -lea*, 54-55.

²³ Cristina Sircuța, *Vioța femeilor în România interbelică*, (Bucharest: Oscar Print, 2006), 113.

²⁴ Art. 4 from Law of Secondary Education published in The Official Gazette no. 105 from May 15, 1928.

²⁵ Alin Ciupală, *Femeie în societate românească a sec. XIX*, 59-60. Vezi și Sabina Cantacuzino, *Din viața familiei I. C. Brătianu 1821-1891*, (Bucharest: Universul, 1933).

²⁶ This was in fact a faithful translation of the 1804 Napoleonic Code and which was said to have appeared “as a form without substance and as a brutal abandonment of the old Romanian law” which took time to be assimilated by showing that it was only at the end of the First War that this French inspirational code could be grounded. See Mircea Dan Bob (coord.), *Familie și moștenire în România*, (Bucharest: Universul Juridic, 2016), 31.

²⁷ “Unable to contract are: 1. Minors; 2. The Prohibited; 3. Women”, Civil Code promulgated by Decree no. 1655 from 1864. This provision will be maintained up until 1932 when the law for raising civil marital incapacity of women was published, promulgated by Decree No. 1412, Official Gazette no. 94 from April 20, 1932.

²⁸ Calypso Botez, “Drepturile femeii în Constituția viitoare” în *Noua Constituție o României. 23 de prelegeri publice în consolidarea unității naționale (Evoluția problemei constituționale în România interbelică)*, (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1923), 86.

²⁹ November 26, 1864 Civil Code published in The Official Gazette no. 271 from Decembrie 4, 1864. Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc*, p 18.

³⁰ Romanian Constitution, published in The Official Gazette no. 142 from July 1, 1866.

In Romania, roles within the family start to change during World War I when women from the rural environment obtained the status of “head of the family” by the law on the administration of the patrimony of the mobilized villagers.³¹ Therefore, during World War I, Romanian women begin to effectively impose themselves outside the private and family space, not only by their attitude of support of the fight undertaken by their fathers, brothers or husbands, but also by real actions of economic, administrative and even political involvement³². The public framework slowly starts to become a privilege of women too. The difficult moments that happened during the war made them aware of the fact that they are capable and can do much more than the obsolete legislation, that no longer fitted the new realities, allowed them to do.

The Resolution of the National Assembly of Alba Iulia from December 1, 1918, included at paragraph III, mentions regarding general, direct, equal, secret, common vote proportionately for both sexes³³. However, the 1923 Constitution didn't provide women's suffrage. Article 6 of this new Constitution stipulated that by special laws “the conditions under which women can exercise political rights”³⁴ will be determined. Such special laws will not be developed. Only in 1929, women will benefit a limited suffrage right when they acquired the right to vote and to be elected in the communal and county councils.³⁵

It is also worth mentioning that the 1923 fundamental law of the state, provided at article 137, that all regal regulations that existed prior to 1923, in the provinces reunited with Romania, will be maintained until legislative unification is achieved. The rules of law didn't have a homogenous character throughout the country, therefore, women benefited from either a small or a large number of rights, depending on the region in which they lived³⁶. Back then, in Romania there were five different legal regulations, namely: The 1865 Civil Code from the Old Principality, The Russian Civil Code from Bessarabia, The Austrian Civil Code from Bukovina and part of Transylvania and the Customary Hungarian Law together with some provisions of the Austrian Code in the rest of Transylvania!³⁷

The 1923 Constitution with all its shortcomings, was nevertheless a first step towards the equality of the two sexes, showing that “women's civil rights will be established on the basis of full equality of the two sexes”³⁸. Civilian gender equality will be further established by The 1932 Law of lifting the legal incapacity of the married woman³⁹, by which article 950 from Civil Code was abrogated. But a number of other articles still remained in force, such as article 195 from Civil Code, according to which the woman must obey her husband and it ruled the inferiority of women to men.

The 1938 Constitution didn't bring about any change in the women's rights, however it ruled that the conditions and rules imposed in order to participate in the elections were to be determined by an election law⁴⁰. This New 1939 Election Law stipulated for the first time women's right to vote. This right was granted provided that women must be at least 30 years of age and must know how to read and write⁴¹. This led in fact to a drastic limitation of women's participation to vote and the dictatorship of King Carol II made practically impossible the exercising of suffrage rights.

Once the Communist Regime was settled, from the normative point of view, the principle of equal opportunity begins to assert itself. However, under these circumstances, equal opportunity meant in fact

³¹ December 23, 1916 Law relative to the administration of the mobilized villagers' patrimony, published in The Official Gazette no. 221 from December 23, 1916.

³² In this context we can recall Queen Marie's attitude and actions regarding Romania's entry in World War I on the side of Triple Entente.

³³ Ioan Scurtu (coord.), *Istoria României între anii 1918 – 1944. Culegere de documente*, (Bucharest: Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, 1982), 25-26.

³⁴ Romanian Constitution, published in The Official Gazette no. 282/March 29, 1923.

³⁵ Law no. 167 from August 3, 1929 for organising local administration, published in The Official Gazette no. 170/ August 3, 1929.

³⁶ Cristina Sircuța, *Vioța femeilor în România interbelică*, 162.

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ Romanian Constitution, published in The Official Gazette no. 282/March 29, 1923.

³⁹ Promulgated by Decree no. 1412, published in The Official Gazette no. 94 from April 20, 1932.

⁴⁰ Articles 61 and 63 of Romanian Constitution, published in The Official Gazette no. 48/February 27, 1938.

⁴¹ Article 5 of Law-Decree regarding the electoral reform, published in The Official Gazette no. 106 bis from May 9, 1939.

equalization, which didn't aim at fair treatment and an increase in women's quality of life but only, for example, in the economic sector, they were used as a labour force for the industrialization of Romania.⁴²

3. The Beginning of Romanian Feminist Movement

In a broad sense, feminism represents the struggle for women's rights and has, over time, made an important contribution to changing their situation.⁴³

In Romania, feminism has made its appearance at the beginning of the 19th Century.⁴⁴ It has developed around the same time as the one from western countries but referring to the Romanian social, cultural and political realities.⁴⁵

Women with a typically feminist attitude existed of course in the history of our people prior to this century⁴⁶, but the term was not known in the era and we can't speak for that time about a coherent, conscious feminist movement.

Referring to the legal status of women, we can say that what gave a boost to the formation of a feminist movement was first, as we have previously shown, their inferior normative status. This will lead to the configuration of the beginning of a battle whose aim or target was to change the legislation.

The feminist movement started to battle for girls' right to an education, although illiteracy remains a pressing issue in Romanian society, even at the beginning of the 20th Century, as the 1930 Census demonstrates⁴⁷, their access to various forms of education will lead to the formation of an increasingly consistent group of educated women that will demonstrate that gender differences do not necessarily mean a self-evident intellectual inferiority. Even if, at the beginning the state will only entrust them with the administration and supervision of girls' schools⁴⁸, they begin to impose control over this small sector of public life which will eventually allow them to form and impose new values which will facilitate the long-term change of a significantly patriarchal mentality, from the late 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century. Therefore, starting with the education system, a beginning is created regarding the general phenomenon of emancipation.

Further on, when we talk about the beginning of the Romanian feminist movement, we have in mind the social framework in which a small group of women, namely educated women had access to information. We therefore speak of a feminism of the urban elite⁴⁹ because it is hard to imagine an extensive feminist movement of the rural environment, where the majority of the population lived.⁵⁰

⁴² See Alina Hurubean (coord.), *Statutul femeii în România Comunistă. Politici publice și viață privată*, (Iași: Institutul European, 2015).

⁴³ Otilia Dragomir, Mihaela Miroiu (coord.), *Lexicon feminist*, 121-122. In this context, we can talk about several orientations/directions that have influenced each other such as: liberal, socialist, radical, postmodern, feminism, ecofeminism.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 200. In 1815, the Romanian Women's Society from Buda, with over 30 members, was established.

⁴⁵ When we talk about Romanian feminism, we consider the type of patriarchal, traditionalist society, with all the consequences that come from here. Of course, not only feminism has had a certain course due to this composition of society, but feminism is the one we refer to in this context.

⁴⁶ Georgeta Fodor, "Provocările vieții cotidiene. Aspecte privind viața femeilor din Țara Românească, Moldova și Transilvania în secolele XV – XVII", in *Studio Universitatis Petru Maior*, Seria Historia, nr. 10, (Târgu Mureș: Universității "Petru Maior", 2010), 13-28. In this regard see also Vasile Papadopol, *Românice vîzute de străini*, (București: Corint, 2016); Constantin Gane, *Amorțe și vesele vieți de jupîne și cucoane*; Nicolae Iorga, *Femeile în viața neomului nostru*, (Bucharest: Cortex, 2014); Idem, *Scrisori de femei*, (Bucharest: Vremea, 2014).

⁴⁷ According to the 1930 census, both in the urban and the rural areas men that know how to read and write are much more numerous than women. In fact, the illiteracy of women determines the high percentage of illiteracy in Romania.

Women in rural areas accounted for over 40% of the country's total population aged over 7, and this high proportion of women only gave 37.8% of literate women. There is also a major discrepancy between the provinces of Great Romania in terms of level of instruction. Statistics data show a strong cultural inferiority of women compared to men in Oltenia (70,4% men, 31% women), Muntenia (74,2% men, 41,9% women) and Bessarabia (51,4% men, 25,1% women). At the opposite pole was Banat (80,1% men, 64,4% men), Transylvania (73,8% men, 62,9% men.) See *Enciclopedia României*, Vol. I, (Bucharest, 1938), pp.142-145. Ion Alexandrescu, *Recensămintele României. Mică Enciclopedie*, (Bucharest: Meronia, 2007), 59-63.

⁴⁸ Alin Ciupală, *Femeie în societatea românească*, 60-61.

⁴⁹ Mihaela Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie. Teorii politice feministe*, (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 60.

⁵⁰ According to the 1899 census, only 18.8% of the total population lived in the urban area and the remaining 81.2% in the rural area, a situation that does not change much at the beginning of the 20th century when, according to The 1930 Census, 78,9% of the inhabitants live in villages and only 20,1% in the cities. Ion Alexandrescu, *Recensămintele României*, 29-54.

One of the first feminist societies made under these conditions is The Romanian Women Society from Buda, created in 1815. This society had over 30 members among them Maria Roja, Pelaghia Papacosta, Maria Nicolici, all of them coming from Macedonian – Romanian merchants families. The society's goal was the financial contribution for "supporting the fund of the Orthodox national schools from the Kingdom of Hungary."⁵¹

After Paragraph 16 of The Islaz Proclamation (1848) provided "equal instruction for every Romanian of both sexes", subsequently important historical events from Romania's history such as The 1848 Revolution⁵², The 1859 Unification of Romanian Principalities⁵³, as well as The 1877-1878 War of Independence, were important occasions from which women took advantage in order to come out of the private space.

Women's participation in the campaign of independence was considered "the baptism of fire"⁵⁴ for the entire feminine elite (feminist or not) faced with a new challenge – war. Field hospitals replaced old salons, by their own efforts ambulances that will be sent to the front will be equipped, and the most important contribution of women to the war effort is therefore in the healthcare field.⁵⁵ It is noticed that after the war ended, women's committees that have taken care of the wounded won't disappeared but will turn into various associations, some of them still active today in healthcare. Besides those, new feminist associations have appeared, all aiming at improving women's situation. As an example, we can mention: Romanian Ladies' Society from Bukovina with its headquarters at Cernăuți. Romanian Women's League from Iași with branches in several cities, "Sprijinul" Romanian Women's Association – founded by Ecaterina Arbore and Virginia Alexandrescu, Woman's Culture and Help Association headed by Sarmiza Bilcescu – Alimănișteanu, Romanian Women National Orthodox Society (SONFR) run by the one that can be said she dominated the social and political emancipation movement of women in interwar Romania, Alexandrina Cantacuzino.⁵⁶

The experience gained during the War of Independence would be used again in 1913 during The Second Balkan War, when the Romanian army had to face the cholera epidemic and especially during World War I.⁵⁷

The feminist movement was strongly marked by The Great War. The losses and profound suffering endured by the Romanian state with the entry into the war have led to the suppression of the claim of women's rights and the adoption of social activism to support both those on the front and the civilian population. According to Alexandra Petrescu, war has a double effect: a negative one because its outbreak has stopped discussions that have just begun regarding suffrage, but also a positive one because at the end of the conflagration, women were in a position to request the right to vote as a "reward" for their sacrifice. For Romania, the social and political contexts were also favourable as a result of achieving unity, a political act that both women and men took part in.⁵⁸

Therefore War offered the feminist movement a new framework of assertion. The number of women that joined the movement in the interwar period increased significantly, the 1920's being its peak.

⁵¹ Otilia Dragomir, Mihaela Miroiu (coord.), *Lexicon Feminist*, 200.

⁵² Among the militant women of the period there are: Ana Ipătescu who through her intervention managed to save the revolutionary government, Maria Rosetti, Catinca Caracaș, Maria Eliade Rădulescu, Elena Cuza, Zoie Goleșcu. See Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc*, p19.

⁵³ Among those who are notable is Dora d Istria (Elena Ghica), a personality that enjoys a great prestige in European intellectual circles, the author of extensive works of international politics, economic life or political science. Author of important feminist studies, she supports the idea of the state unity of the Romanians both for the nation's progress and for improving the situation of women. In the same context of the 1859 unifying moment is the activity of Sofia Cocea Chrisoscoleu and also that of Constanța Duca Schiau, especially in the field of education development and organization. Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc*, 20-21, 66-69; 70-72.

⁵⁴ Alin Ciupală, *Femeie în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea*, 85.

⁵⁵ For example, Elisa Brătianu tells how her father's grandmother set up a 20-bed hospital at Buftea. *Ibid*, 85 and 137 note 43.

⁵⁶ Otilia Dragomir, Mihaela Miroiu (coord.), *Lexicon Feminist*, 201-202. See și Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Contacuzino și mișcarea feministă din onii interbelici*, (Bucharest: Cetatea de Scaun, 2014)

⁵⁷ Alin Ciupală, *Femeie în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea*, 85 – 86.

⁵⁸ Alexandra Petrescu, "Le féminisme roumain et le vote universel entre les deux guerres", in *Studio Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol III, n° 3, Bucharest, September 2003, 790-791.

Certainly, the role that women had to assume with the outbreak of the Great War resulted in a change in the status of women in society. The need to undertake new commitments will cause changes in the minds of women who felt chained by an obsolete legislation. An example would be that in order to be employed, women needed their husband's consent, this being impossible to obtain from mobilized men or prisoners.

After the war, all efforts of the feminist movement were channelled to include the right to vote "for both sexes" as it was foreseen in The Resolution of Alba Iulia. Therefore, in the period before The 1923 Constitution was written, Romanian feminists had an intense activity. In order to plead their cause numerous press articles are published⁵⁹, press conferences are held, feminists associations are reorganised in order to ensure a unitary management of their actions. For example, in 1921, The National Council of Romanian Women (CNFR) is formed, run by an executive committee made of representatives of all local feminist groups and its purpose was the unitary leadership of feminist actions. This Council will be affiliated in the same year to The International Women's Council, established since 1888. Within the Council, Elena Văcărescu was delegated to represent the Council in dealing with France, England, Belgium, Italy, Spain, North America, and Elena Râmnicănu in dealing with Switzerland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Austria, and Bulgaria.⁶⁰ Other personalities from this period are Eleonora Stratulescu, Alexandrina Cantacuzino, Calypso Botez, Elena Meissner.⁶¹

With all the involvement of the feminist movement, the right to vote in equal conditions for both sexes does not materialize with The 1923 Constitution and it can be interpreted as a failure of the feminist movement. However, the long-standing actions of feminist associations will lead to the granting of the partial political vote given to women in 1929, namely the right to elect and to be elected in the communal and county councils, this right being reserved to certain categories of women and only if certain criteria were met, such as the completion of a secondary, normal or vocational education cycle⁶², criteria met at that time by a very small number of women, the vast majority being illiterate.

In conclusion we can state that Feminism, a product of the modern age, is a social protest movement that results in the modernization of society as a whole. In the Romanian society at the beginning of the 20th Century, women were forced to go through an "inclusion process as well as a social exclusion one"⁶³.

Feminists had to fight with a limited conception that women's emancipation will result in the change of traditional places both in and outside the family.⁶⁴

The principle of equal opportunity between the two sexes will, at least normative, be fully stated in Decree no. 2218 from July 13, 1946, regarding the exercise of legislative power where it appears that "women have the right to vote and may be elected in the Assembly of Members under the same conditions as men", the same decree introduced in Article 3 the principle of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Articles in the feminist press have supported the need for emancipation not only at the political level, but also at the social, economic and cultural one. The need to extend women's rights was also suggested by the titles of feminist publications: "Românca", "Drepturile Femeii", "Viitorul românelor", "Acțiunea feministă".

⁶⁰ Cristina Sircuța, *Viața femeilor în România interbelică*, 282 – 283. It is noteworthy that at a Congress of the Alliance on Women's regarding Voting Rights, that took place in Rome between May 12 – 19, 1923 Alexandrina Cantacuzino has initiated "The Little Feminine Understanding", of the association of leaders of the feminist movement from Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Yugoslavia, its goal was obtaining political rights for women, but also maintaining peace in the Balkans. See Anemari Monica Negru (ed.), *Alexandrina Cantacuzino*, vol. I, 35-39, 208-222.

⁶¹ Mihaela Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie*, p. 62. The prominent personalities of the Romanian feminist movement are presented with biographical data in the study of Ștefana Mihăilescu, "Istoria feminismului politic românesc (1815 – 2000)", 219-227, in Otilia Dragomir, Mihaela Miroiu, *Lexicon feminist*.

⁶² Article 375 of Law no. 167 from August 3, 1929, regarding the organization of public administration, published in the Official Gazette no. 170 from August 3, 1929.

⁶³ Silvana Rachieru, "Includerea/excluderea socială a femeilor în România modernă (1878 - 1914)", in Alin Ciupală (coord.), *Despre femei și istoria lor în România*, 37-44.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

⁶⁵ Article 2 of Royal Decree no. 2281 from July 13, 1946, regarding the exercise of legislative power, published in The Official Gazette no. 161 from July 15, 1946.

Then, every constitution from the Communist Period, namely the ones from 1948⁶⁶, 1952⁶⁷, 1965⁶⁸ and 1986⁶⁹, proclaimed rights and liberties regardless of sex, however, in the context of totalitarian communism, they were virtually violated and the situations of women instead of improving, meets a heavier and darker period, than the feminists of the pre-war and interwar period, who projected a bright future with the legal recognition of equal rights, could ever have imagined.

4. Conclusions

Therefore, from what we have shown, we have to say that at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century, women in Romanian society had an inferior status which they began to realize at a mass level, especially after World War I. In this context, the fight for civil and political rights represents a field, but a major one, in the history of women.

We must not understand that until the 19th century women were not discriminated. On the contrary, this thing happened, as we have shown above. However, certain things expect an evolution. Discrimination was practiced in the 17th and 18th Centuries, but back then the concept didn't exist. For example, back then, women didn't have the right to vote anywhere and this distinction also existed without being questioned.⁷⁰ Studies then show that inequality models established in a particular society are passed on to the next generations and therefore, children and subsequently adults from next generations take them over as morally correct.⁷¹ If we understand this thing, we also understand why patriarchal mentalities were perpetuated in the Romanian society despite the natural social evolution.

If we are to report to the beginning of the 20th century, but it is all the more applicable to previous centuries, but also a constant of today's society, historical sources provide information especially about noticeable women who detached themselves, about those who were at the top of the social pyramid, of which one might say they were coming out of the typical rule and, perhaps that is what made them remain mentioned in all sorts of testimonies. By contrast, there is much less information about the women at the base of the social hierarchy, about those who represented the majority of the female population, those "invisible, but always present". In order to emphasize the status of the latter, we have considered the legislation but we must also consider the habits, the morals and everything that could create a mentality of the period.

I conclude by saying that from all the related facts it is evident that the Romanian society was and, unfortunately, still remains a profoundly patriarchal one. I think that psychology might show why some societies are more inclined to discriminate than others, but also individually, why some individuals are more inclined to discriminate than others.

The woman can be surprised in a variety of manifestations, beyond rules and regulations, both in public and in private space. For example, within family, a space reserved for her, the woman assumed all attitudes and behaviours, not only as a loving wife and a companion of her husband, but also as an educator of her children and a perfect housewife.

This article addresses in particular the public space of the struggle for rights, an area where feminist information is very valuable. However, feminine hypostases of the woman-wife, woman of culture, artist, but also mistress and even prostitute can also be identified. These will probably be approached in a future article.

Undoubtedly, further research could bring to light new information on the social and legal status of women.

Today, legally speaking, the legislation has changed, we have aligned to international standards, the *acquis communautaire* has been implemented, however, the mentality has not changed very much, the Romanian

⁶⁶ The Constitution of the Popular Republic of Romania, published in The Official Gazette no. 87 bis/April 13, 1948.

⁶⁷ The Constitution of the Popular Republic of Romania, published in The Official Gazette no. 1 from September 27, 1952.

⁶⁸ The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania, published in The Official Gazette no. 1 from August 21, 1965.

⁶⁹ The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Romania, published in The Official Gazette no. 65 from October 29, 1986.

⁷⁰ Michael Bonton, *Discriminare*, (Bucharest: Du Style, 1998), p.22.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 25.

society remains a patriarchal one in addressing the issue of women's status. Feminist research therefore tries not only to “render the women to history”, but also to “render the history to women”, considering that “Her-story” would be necessary, as much as “His-story”⁷². It is of course an exaggeration, but one that proves necessary in this context because, in order to reach the “golden middle way” it is often necessary to reach the extremes and therefore we may come to understand that by analysing and understanding the history of women, we will know and understand the history of mankind.

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⁷² Mihaela Miroiu, *Gândul umbrei. Abordări feministe în filosofia contemporană*, (Bucharest: Alternative, 1995), 33

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